

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 217 378

CS 006 675

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TITLE From Turn-Taking to Sense-Making: Classroom Factors and Improved Reading Achievement.
INSTITUTION Michigan State Univ., East Lansing. Inst. for Research on Teaching.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Jun 82
CONTRACT 400-76-0073
NOTE 27p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the Reading Symposium on "Factors Related to Reading Performance" (Milwaukee, WI, June 10-11, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Communication; *Classroom Techniques; Elementary Education; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; Student Teacher Relationship; Teacher Effectiveness; *Teacher Improvement; *Teaching Methods

IDENTIFIERS *Turntaking (Instructional)

ABSTRACT

Classroom studies indicate that turn-taking--when a teacher asks a question or assigns a reading turn, the child responds, and the teacher reinforces or corrects--is the format of most school lessons. The problem with this format is that it emphasizes pupil response without providing for teacher explanation and the other forms of substantive verbal assistance. This absence of teacher explanation leads to instructional inequity, focuses on answers rather than on process, and masks the teacher's explanatory role in instruction. The turn-taking model can be modified so that teachers provide deductive or inductive explanations at the outset of the lesson and then conduct turn-taking. Including such explanations provides students with specific assistance regarding problem solving strategies. Qualitative studies reveal that effective teacher explanation includes explicit information on what is being taught and why it is important, and clearly tells students how to do the task. In addition, effective explanation requires that teachers talk more and monitor student cognitive processing as they restructure their explanations, providing appropriate elaboration as needed. Finally, good explanation provides cohesion across lessons. Turn-taking is difficult to modify because it is a tradition in American schools, one that appears to work and to ease the problems of classroom management. However, providing explanations is a crucial part of the teacher's instructional effort, and is essential if all pupils are to view reading as a sense-making rather than a mechanical process.
(HTH)

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FROM TURN-TAKING TO SENSE-MAKING: CLASSROOM FACTORS
AND IMPROVED READING ACHIEVEMENT

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A paper prepared for presentation at the University of Wisconsin Reading Symposium on Factors Related to Reading Performance, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 10, 1982.

The work reported herein is sponsored by the Institute for Research on Teaching, College of Education, Michigan State University. The Institute for Research on Teaching is funded primarily by the Teaching Division of the National Institute of Education, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the position, policy or endorsement of the National Institute of Education. (Contract No. 400-76-0073)

The author gratefully acknowledges the substantial-conceptual assistance provided by Arlene Anang, Jere Brophy, Christopher Clark, William Metheny and Laura Roehler.

CS086675-

Context shapes behavior. Hughes Mearns (1958) illustrated this in a poem about correct language usage:

When looking out I see a car
Of friends come calling from afar,
I cry to Mother right away,
"Oh, that is they! Oh, that is they!"

When in my room with girls and boys
I hear, "Who's making all that noise?"
I step outside and cheerfully
Call down, "It's we! It's only we!"

When Teacher asks, "Who has, pray speak,
"A birthday in the coming week?"
And I have, then I'm mighty spry
To say, "Please, Ma'am, it will be I."

But pounding on a bolted door
With bears behind me, three or four
If I should hear, "Who could that be?"
I'd scream, "It's me! It's me! It's me!"

The message is no less true for reading instruction. Here, too, context shapes behavior. In reading, however, the situation is more complex. The context is multi-faceted, including physical factors (such as classroom dimensions, type of furniture, number of students and instructional materials) and social factors (such as the implicit rules guiding dyadic interaction and the effects of various social organizations).

These contextual factors influence teacher behavior and, presumably, student outcomes. For instance, when class size is increased, teachers tend to change their instructional behavior, and different outcomes result. Bossert (1979) McDermott (1977) and Mehan (1979) suggest similar relationships regarding social context.

This paper, however, argues that the dominant classroom factor during reading instruction is neither social nor physical. It is the psychological belief that instruction in reading is accomplished by assigning turns to pupils, usually without prior explanation. Because turn-taking is the hub of instructional activity in reading, it is suggested that greater teacher effectiveness and, ultimately, improved reading achievement depends upon our ability to incorporate teacher explanation into this pattern.

Background

Historically, reading instructional research has been conducted without concern for teacher behavior. For instance, a major reading instructional research effort of the 1960's--the First Grade Studies (Bond and Dykstra, 1967)--included no information about what went on in the classrooms. The only data were pupil achievement measures. It was apparently assumed that each teacher would carry out instruction in the manner prescribed by the method and that, hence, what happened in the classrooms in the interim between testing sessions was of little importance.

However, since the early 1970's researchers have looked in classrooms in three ways. The first, known as "process-product research, focused on carefully defined teacher instructional behaviors and how these correlated with achievement outcomes. The results of such studies gave rise to "direct instruction," a general concept which places a premium on academic focus, pupil engaged time on task and careful teacher monitoring of pupil response (Rosenshine, 1976; 1979). Experimental studies based on such correlational findings provided further evidence of its positive impact, particularly in the area of primary grade reading (Anderson, Evertson and Brophy, 1979). By the late

1970's, there was a general sense that the process-product findings had answered the question regarding what made certain teachers more effective than others. As described by Brophy (1982b) and others (Duffy, 1981), the effective teacher (1) allocates most of the classroom time to instruction and enhances student use of this time through efficient classroom management: (2) sets positive expectancies for pupils and backs these up by engaging students in academic activities which result in very high success rates and (3) assumes responsibility for actively teaching, and avoids simply managing instruction through the distribution, monitoring and correcting of assignments.

Unqualified support of process-product findings began to wane in the late - 1970's, with the advent of descriptive field studies of reading instruction. For instance, Brophy (1982a), Duffy and McIntyre (in press), and Durkin (1978-79) reported classroom reading practices which, although they seemed to embody the process-product findings, did not include teacher assistance to students. The instruction had an academic focus, the pupils were engaged and the teacher monitored carefully, but the quality of the lessons was poor! Similarly, researchers of teacher thinking and decision-making, who hypothesized that the most effective teachers are those who select instructional strategies from among alternatives based on conceptual models which guide and govern thinking, found evidence of teacher decision-making in the planning stages of instruction (Borko, Shavelson & Stern, 1981; Clark & Yinger 1980), but noted that actual instruction was based on routines which provide structure and predictability, rather than on conceptual models (Duffy, 1981). Finally, when one examined student responses to classroom reading instruction (Anderson, 1981), it was clear that sense-making was not an outcome. Such research highlighted the mechanical way reading instruction is often conducted in real classrooms

and the paucity of teacher explanation regarding what is being taught. The instructional focus seemed to be on keeping things moving smoothly rather than on providing quality assistance to students.

These classroom findings caused researchers to look beyond process-product findings to determine what makes teachers effective. The result was a growing interest in classroom context. Researchers began to think about classroom instruction as dynamic and fluid, occurring within a collective setting involving both structural subtleties of environment and interactional subtleties of communication. From this came an understanding of why teachers emphasize materials management and place relatively little emphasis on active teaching and explaining. The context constrains instructional practice, limiting teacher options and encouraging the use of routines and mechanical monitoring procedures which simplify the task of working in a complex environment. In a word, because classrooms are hectic places, teachers use routinized techniques to insure some degree of predictability and control.

The result is an expanded view of teacher effectiveness. The process-product findings are now viewed as prerequisite to effective instruction but not as the total picture. For instance, while it is clear that a teacher's classroom management skills are crucial to effective instruction and that failure to get pupils engaged and to keep them engaged results in low achievement, it is equally clear that well-managed classrooms do not necessarily guarantee quality instruction or substantive instructional assistance to pupils. Consequently, for the 1980's, the pressing question about classrooms and improved reading achievement is, "How can teachers, despite the complexities of classroom context, provide reading instruction which emphasizes sense-making and minimize mechanical monitoring?" This paper is based on the assumption that the key lies with modifying the turn-taking model.

Understanding Turn-taking

Turn-taking is the prevalent instructional model in American schooling. It is assumed that instruction is occurring when a teacher asks a question or assigns a turn, the child responds, and the teacher reinforces or corrects. The repetition of this format forms the structure of most lessons. In reading, for instance, the turn-taking pattern is evident in oral round robin reading, in the questioning which follows the reading of basal stories and in the presentation of workbook pages. By assigning turns, the material in the basal gets covered. Hence, while turn-taking is used frequently by sociolinguists such as Mehan (1979) to describe the process by which teachers and students decide who gets a turn during instruction, it refers here to a prior question. Rather than who gets a turn, the procedure itself is being questioned. The premise is that turn-taking, not who gets a turn, creates teachers who interrogate rather than teach (Durkin, 1978-79), who assess rather than assist (Duffy & McIntyre, in press).

Such turn-taking is reflected in typical "teacher talk" patterns during instruction. Most teacher talk seldom exceeds two or three lines of audio tape transcript, as shown in Figure 1 (Duffy & Roehler, Note 1). Student responses are of the same length or shorter and consist primarily of providing the "right" answer. For instance, the following instructional interaction occurred during a second grade lesson on main idea:

T: You listen to the story I read you and I will give you three possibilities for titles. I want you to listen to the story real closely. See if you can pick out a good title for it. Alright, here is my story.

(teacher reads story orally)

Alright, now here are some possibilities. A trip downtown. A new shirt. The shirt that didn't fit. Now, those three possibilities, which one would go best? Angela?

C: A trip downtown?

C: A trip downtown.

T: Okay, Tom, what do you think?

C: The new shirt.

T: Andy, what was your choice?

C: The new shirt.

T: Susie, how about you?

C: The new shirt.

T: I think the girls decided on the trip downtown and the boys liked the new shirt. Mainly, what was the story about?

C: A trip downtown.

C: Getting a new shirt.

TEACHER A
TASK 2 - MARCH 2
TEACHER TALK PATTERN

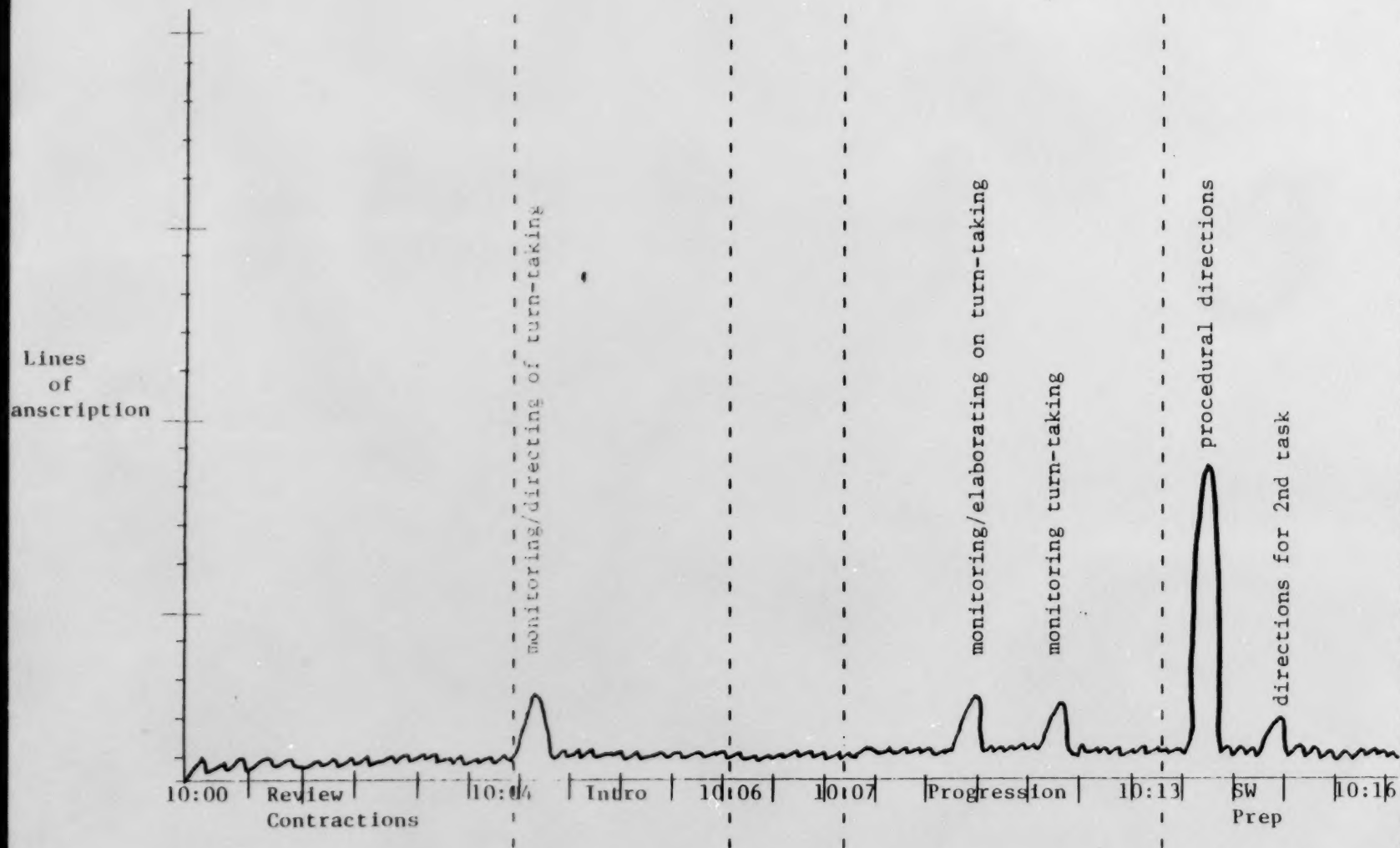


FIGURE 1

T: Getting a new shirt, wasn't it?

The dependence upon a turn-taking model is clear. The teacher offers no prior explanation or strategy; she only asks for answers. Similarly, her responses to pupil answers do not create an understanding of either the main idea or a strategy for figuring out the main idea. Apparently, students are expected to generate both the answer and the strategy through the process of responding in turn to the questions.

Even when the teacher makes an effort to supply explanation or shape pupil responses, the result leaves something to be desired. Consider the following excerpt from another lesson in the same second grade classroom:

T: We're going to talk about possessives. What's a possessive, Matt?

C: (no response)

T: A possessive shows ownership. How do you show ownership?

C: (no response)

T: When you add an apostrophe s to "boy" it shows that the boy has something. The boy's. Can you make up a sentence for kitten?

C: There's a basket full of kittens.

T: You added just s. That's more than one kitten. This time make it ownership. Troy?

C: The kitten always owns the basket.

T: Alright, but can you change the sentence around? You're saying the kitten owns the basket. Let's use kitten and basket.

C: Kitten basket.

T: But with an apostrophe s.

C: The kitten's basket.

T: The kitten's--that's the kitten's basket. Alright, what belongs to the kitten, Jennifer?

C: The basket.

T: The basket. Alright, let's try it with dolphins.

The teacher's explanations are limited to a single sentence at a time and are punctuated by requests for pupil responses. Her intent seems to be to keep the activity moving and to get the right answer. There is little evidence that she explicates either a sensible understanding of the function of possessives or a strategy for using them effectively.

The problem with turn-taking is not the idea of taking turns nor the focus on student response. To the contrary, the above examples would not be improved by having students respond in unison or by eliminating student opportunity to respond. The problem is the reliance on an instructional interaction pattern which emphasizes pupil response without providing for teacher explanation and other forms of substantive verbal assistance.

The absence of teacher explanation in instructional interaction has at least three consequences for reading instruction. First, it poses a problem of equity. It is an implicit assumption of turn-taking that all students learn by responding to turns--that all students can spontaneously generate a sense for how reading works by being given exposure to reading tasks (such as basal stories and workbook pages) and by being directed to those tasks with questions. While some students undoubtedly do learn while taking turns, it is doubtful that all students are equally able to do so. Low aptitude students particularly may be too mystified about how reading works to spontaneously generate answers without benefit of prior explanation. By expecting such students to figure out answers for themselves in basically the same way as the high aptitude reader, we fail to respond to their needs and create an inequitable instructional situation.

A second consequence of minimizing explanation is that it forces both teachers and pupils to focus on answers, rather than process. When the teacher assigns a turn, the right answer is required. Consequently, the emphasis is on accuracy, not sense-making. Reading instruction, in contrast, ought to be based on the understanding that our language is composed of a reasonably logical set of conventions which, if understood, help us make sense out of reading. These conventions, usually presented as skills, should be explained as problem-solving strategies which provide a sense of predictability in interpreting print. The turn-taking model, with its focus on answer-getting rather than explanation of how the process works, causes both teachers and pupils to view reading as a mechanical activity rather than as a set of sensible conventions.

Third, turn-taking masks the teacher's explanatory role in instruction. Webster defines teaching as "imparting knowledge of or skill in." The verb "impart" implies that the teacher actively explains, illuminates and clarifies. Turn-taking, however, places teachers in a passive role, limiting him/her to interrogation or to assignment of turns and to feedback regarding the correctness of the response. As a consequence, teachers do not know how to explain when the poorer readers do not "catch on" spontaneously. While Allington (1980), McDermott (1977), Collins (Note 2) and others suggest that poor readers have difficulty because teachers provide them with different instruction, it actually seems that the instruction they receive is basically the same as that offered the good reader groups. The turn-taking model still prevails; teachers still ask questions or assign turns and explanation is still hard to find. The only real difference is that teachers slow things down for poor reader groups. They break the instruction into small pieces, they drill more and they move more slowly. In short, they try to simplify the task while still using turn-taking (and, as Brophy (in press) suggests, probably fragment the learning too much in the process).

Other than this, however, there is no substantive difference between the good reader groups and the poor reader groups. Neither gets illuminating explanations, explicit strategies, or modeling designed to help pupils become conscious of the sense-making principles of language.

What To Do

It is presumed that reading instruction which emphasizes conscious sense-making is to be desired over mechanical instruction. The question is, "What should we do to achieve such instruction?"

The key lies with modifying the turn-taking model, particularly for low group students. Specifically, teachers ought to provide deductive or inductive explanations at the outset of the lesson and then conduct turn-taking. Including explanation provides students (especially those who do not "catch on" spontaneously) with specific assistance regarding how the language process works and how skills can be applied as problem-solving strategies to make reading a sensible and controllable activity. In short, they know how to respond before being assigned a turn. In addition, explanation also helps teachers use turn-taking as a "window" on student processing, rather than as a place to get answers. By emphasizing process in explanation, they are prepared to look for evidence of successful processing, rather than right answers, during turn-taking.

By modifying the turn-taking model in this way, teacher effectiveness can be improved. When a teacher does not explain, whether deductively or inductively, limits are placed on achievement. Children who might have understood better with an explanation are left with imperfect understanding and children who do not understand at all are left confused. Hence, achievement outcomes are limited and the teacher is less effective.

Preliminary findings from a pilot study of teacher explanation behavior indicates that there is indeed such a relationship between explanation and teacher effectiveness (Duffy & Roehler, Note 1). In the study, three teachers were observed and audiotaped six times each as they taught their low reading group. The natural classroom situation was used, together with contextual constraints. After each observed lesson, the researcher intervened with the teacher, suggesting how explanations could have been improved. After each lesson, pupils were interviewed regarding what they thought they were learning, why they thought it was important, and how to do it. Achievement was also monitored.

The results suggest a relationship between teacher explanations and pupil achievement and awareness. Of the three classrooms, one teacher had extremely poor ratings for his explanation behavior and pupils showed very little growth in either awareness or achievement. In a second classroom, the teacher sporadically exhibited explicit explanation behavior. When she did, the students' awareness and achievement was high; when she returned to a standard turn-taking model, pupil results were lower. Another teacher responded extremely well to intervention and consistently provided highly rated explanations. His pupils responded with consistently high achievement and awareness. Modification of the turn-taking model to include explanation seemed to make both the second and third teacher more effective.

Of equal interest, however, are qualitative results which suggest what makes for effective teacher explanation. Five characteristics have been identified to date.

First, teacher explanation includes explicit information about what is being taught and why it is important. Consider the following contrast between two teachers regarding the explicitness of what is being taught:

Teacher A: Today we are going to do syllables.

Teacher B: Today we are again studying about comprehension,

a comprehension skill of being able to read clues in a paragraph and make a reasonable guess of what is going to happen next, what the author has in mind. They call that making inferences, based on the information you have.

A similar contrast is evident regarding what the two teachers say about why a skill is taught. Teacher A gave no explanation to students about why they were learning syllables but, when interviewed by the researcher, said, "I would hope that they would be able to do the workbook page successfully." In contrast, Teacher B gave students the following purpose for inferencing:

"I want to underline some of the clue words that you need to pay attention to and again, when I do it here it is for the purpose that when you get back to your own reading, whether you are reading a textbook or some fun reading or a newspaper, you are able to pick out these clues yourself."

A second characteristic of explanation is that the teacher clearly tells students how to do the task. For instance, Teacher B, when teaching pupils to use the ou vowel combination to sound out unknown words, gave the following explanation:

Okay, let me tell you how I would do this if I were reading alone. Let's suppose I was reading along and I came to the word "out" and I have never seen the word before, which is really possible. I see an ou and I know ou has the sound of "ow" like Gracie said. It sounds like a w is in there--ow--and I know it has a t at the end and the t sounds like t-t-t. So, I have ow-t, out.

In contrast, note Teacher A's explanation of how to figure out the main idea of a story:

T: Sometimes he (the author) just can't think of a title, so he writes the story first. And then what? When you have the story written?

C: Then you can get ideas from the story.

T: Then you get ideas from the story that is already written down for titles, possible story titles.

C: How I do it is I write a story down and then I write a

title that goes with it.

T: Okay. Well, there are all different ways but I think most of you are understanding that the title comes from the story, doesn't it? The reader has to get an idea of what the story is about. Alright, we've got to move on.

Teacher B puts himself in the student's place and models how he uses the ou as a problem solving strategy. He actually "talks out loud" about what he does so that the usually invisible cognitive processes are made visible. Teacher A, in contrast, maintains the turn-taking pattern and never surfaces the cognitive processing one employs to determine main idea. The closest she gets is to say ". . . the title comes from the story."

Third, because explanation requires verbal communication, teachers using explanation talk more. Figure 2 shows a typical pattern for a deductive and an inductive lesson. Note that the instances of "teacher talk," while lengthier than in turn-taking patterns, are not excessive. Also note that the teacher eventually returns to a turn-taking pattern in order to check student understanding and to solidify the learning.

Fourth, effective explanation requires that teachers must monitor student cognitive processing as they re-structure teacher explanations, providing appropriate elaboration as needed. Consider the following exchange which occurred in Teacher B's classroom following an explanation of connector words:

T: Connector words are what, David?

C: Two words put together.

T: What are connector words, Josh?

C: Two words hooked together.

T: They are not two words. Maybe I explained that incorrectly. A connector word is a word that connects one or more ideas. Okay, in this sentence, "They always walk to school together and they always walk home together." Now in this sentence

TYPICAL EXPLANATIONS

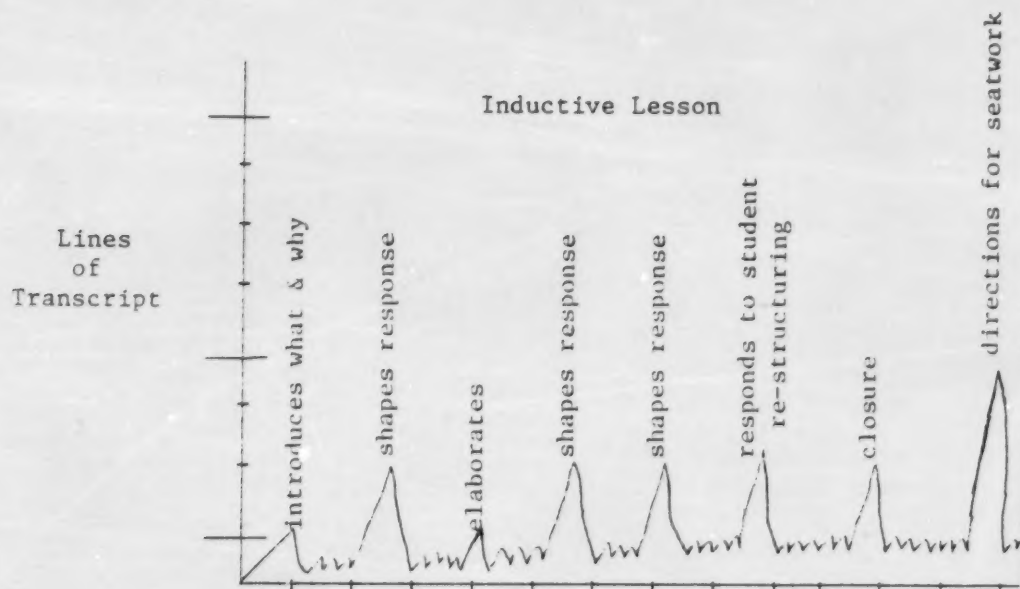
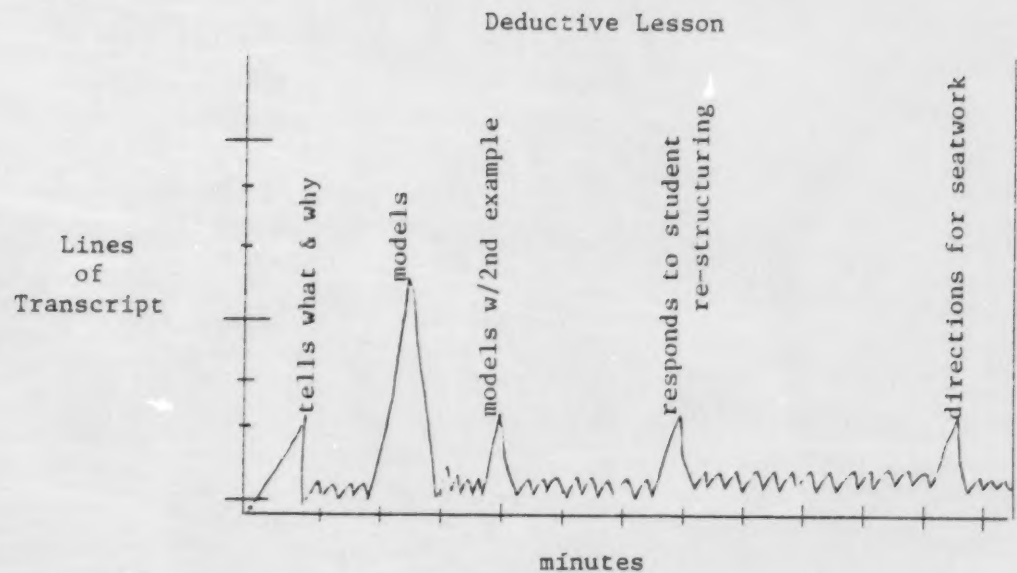


Figure 2

there are two ideas. They always walk to school and they always come home. Of the four connector words I put on the board, which word is connecting the two ideas, David?

C: And.

T: And. Do you see that? And. I have it underlined here. See how it is connecting the ideas of walking to school together and coming home together? It is sort of like a bridge that connects these two. Bridges connect different places, words connect ideas. Connector words connect ideas.

Teacher B responded to the misunderstandings by providing an example, highlighting the role of the connector in the example and supplying an analogy for understanding the function of connectors. In contrast, Teacher A provides less assistance. In the following exchange during a main idea lesson, the responses are not what she really wants:

T: Now imagine that you are the author. Can you think of any other title that you would choose?

C: The shell by the seashore.

T: Alright.

C: Sandy at the sea.

C: The shell at the sea.

C: The pink shell.

T: The pink shell? Think a little bit more. Some times it takes more than (snaps her fingers) like that to come up with an idea. Sit and think a minute.

In contrast to Teacher B, Teacher A counters misunderstanding not by supplying an example and highlighting how to solve the problem but by asking pupils to slow down and think. She returns to the turn-taking model in which the expectation is that students should spontaneously and independently produce correct responses.

Finally, good explanation is characterized by cohesion across lessons. The sequence of Teacher A's lessons showed little cohesion. Typically, she would begin with oral round robin reading, then she would teach a skill and assign a workbook page, then she would teach another skill and assign another workbook page and, if there was still time, she would have some more oral round robin reading. There was never an attempt to connect what was happening in one lesson with what was happening in the next. The following excerpt from a lesson transcript is typical:

T: Alright, we are finished with the first thing that we are going to do. We were going to talk about the story and discuss it. We've done that. Now I would like you to close your books. We're going to think about something that will help you in writing stories.

In contrast, Teacher B organized his instruction to enhance cohesion. He always taught a skill first, then provided practice in using the skill, then guided pupils in applying the skill in basal text stories and then directed them to use the skill when reading independently. He stated explicitly that a skill being taught would immediately be used to make sense out of connected text, with the expectation that students would then apply it themselves when doing "real" reading. Instruction was cohesive, not fragmented.

This study suggests that teacher effectiveness may require more than management of materials and that, given a modification in the turn-taking model, teachers need not be dominated by the complexities created by classroom context. To the contrary, the three pilot classrooms were all taught by teachers who were subject to the same physical and social contexts typically found in many classrooms. However, two of the three teachers improved their instruction by modifying the turn-taking model. Consequently, it is possible that improved achievement can result if teachers are shown

how they can embed substantive instructional assistance into the turn-taking model.

Difficulties in Modifying Turn-Taking

On the surface, it would seem fairly simple to modify the standard turn-taking model to include teacher explanation. It is not, for four reasons.

First, turn-taking is a tradition of American schooling. Our parents remember being taught in a turn-taking mode and our teachers taught us using turn-taking. Consequently, we teach that way ourselves. It is almost second nature. Ask any teacher to spontaneously teach anything and, invariably, the first communication to the student will be a question, not an explanation. The effect of this tradition is most dramatically illustrated in the statements of the researchers themselves. For instance, both Bossert (1979) and Doyle (1981) are eminent researchers of teaching who think long and hard about classroom life. Yet, both equate instruction and turn-taking, with Bossert defining instructional assistance as the "opportunity to answer questions" and Doyle defining it as "answering occasions". Apparently, both take the tradition of turn-taking for granted, and both focus on pupil answers, not teacher explanations.

Second, this tradition has been inadvertently assisted by educators who say that the best teachers use Socratic questioning and discovery techniques, and that "teacher talk" is a sign of poor teaching. As a result, teachers emphasize turn-taking and minimize explanation not only because it is a culturally acceptable way to conduct schooling but because they want to look like good teachers.

Third, turn-taking is a difficult pattern to modify because it appears to work (with the good readers, at least). Good readers do well when given opportunity to respond to turns, so teachers conclude that turn-taking is effective. They reason that poor readers can learn this way

also if they just had more drill and practice. Consequently, poor readers are given opportunity to respond without benefit of prior explanation, forgetting that practice is necessary, but not sufficient, for learning to occur.

The main reason turn-taking persists, however, is because it eases the problems of management in four ways. First, turn-taking as a procedure emphasizes "pupil talk." Teachers reason that students who are talking in an orderly way are involved and that too much "teacher talk" causes pupils to become bored and "off-task". Hence, turn-taking is the teacher's way to insure on-task student behavior. Second, as Bossert (1979) points out, turn-taking places teachers in the center of the action where they can control the behavior of children. By focusing on students rather than explanation and by directing the proper child to respond at the proper time, order is maintained. Third, from this central position teachers can prevent breakdowns in the smooth flow of classroom activity by introducing variations in the turn-taking pattern. For instance, Doyle (Note 3) has observed that in order to keep turn-taking going, teachers adjust the "correctness criterion" to insure that a student can respond to his turn or sometimes even completes the activity for the student. Similarly, McDermott (1977) has reported teacher behavior in which children are denied turns because they do not respond spontaneously when their turn arrives, while Rist (1973) has reported that teachers often conduct what he calls a "phantom lesson" in order to insure a semblance of turn-taking even when nothing is being learned. Finally, the turn-taking model persists because the primary tool of reading instruction -- the basal textbook -- promotes turn-taking and thereby eases management. From the teacher's guide to the workbook pages, basals emphasize turn-taking and minimize explanation, as documented by the work

of Durkin (1981) with teacher's editions and of Osborn (Note 4) with workbooks. Thus, teacher concern about management causes them to view any variation in the pattern -- such as inserting explanation prior to turn-taking -- as a risk because it may disrupt smooth activity flow.

In sum, turn-taking is a very practical way to run instruction. It puts the teacher in a position of control and virtually insures that only one thing will happen at a time. When combined with the forces of tradition, with the faith that it does work and with the fact that many teachers may be engaging in turn-taking because they have not been trained to provide sense-making explanations (Duffy and Roehler, in press), the difficulties in achieving even minor modifications seem immense.

Conclusion

Certainly there are many classroom factors which influence reading achievement. The process-product findings provide a valuable foundation regarding the nature of these factors and the contextual findings provide insight into the complexity and subtlety of the factors. However, the key factor may well be turn-taking. It is the prevalent instructional pattern in American schools. Teachers ask questions and pupils answer them. In this way, instruction is accomplished and the school day proceeds smoothly. Probably nothing else shapes reading instruction more than the expectation that one is teaching when one asks students to respond in turn. In fact, it is the pursuit of this instructional pattern which explains the prevalence of teacher monitoring behavior found in field studies of classroom reading.

However, the drive to achieve risk-free and smooth turn-taking may be an impediment to effective instruction. Students may not be learning -- or may not be learning as much -- because they cannot figure out how to make

sense out of reading simply by being asked to respond to turns. Hence, we must help teachers modify the turn-taking pattern to include explanation. Providing explanations of how to do reading tasks is a crucial part of the teacher's instructional effort, and it is essential if all pupils are to view reading as a sense-making -- rather than a mechanical -- process.

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